

WATCHET U.D.C.  
MEDICAL OFFICER OF HEALTH  
REPORT. 1953.

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My report follows very much the same course as my previous ones.

We have been fortunate in having no major epidemic.

The notifications of infectious diseases during the year were as follows:-

Measles 10 against none in the previous year. Five of these cases were sent to the Isolation Hospital which I think is probably a good thing, it does tend to reduce the number of infective contacts.

Scarlet fever, still a very mild disease, of which one case was sent to the Isolation Hospital.

Whooping cough, 3 cases.

Pneumonia, 4 cases, of which one died.

Erysipelas, 2.

Ophthalmia Neonatorum, one case.



There was a number of cases of Chicken pox which of course is not a notifiable disease. With our very slowly increasing knowledge of virus diseases and the changing character of these I feel that Chicken pox could, with great advantage, be made notifiable. I feel that nowadays it should be considered as being of greater importance than Measles or Scarlet fever.

The germs causing Scarlet fever, for instance, appear to be becoming much less virulent, while the viruses appear to be becoming much more active. We know now that there is a definite connection between Chicken pox and Shingles.

The satisfactory prophylactic injections of combined anti diphtheria and whooping cough vaccines accounts for the reduction in the number of cases of this distressing illness, and I hope in the future will reduce it to a similar minimum as that to which we have reduced diphtheria, many young doctors have never seen a case.

In Watchet the number of live births was 37, the number of primary immunisations against diphtheria up to the age of 4 years, 31, and 5 years, 1. That is, 32. I shall not be content until the number of such immunisations up to the age of say 18 months reaches the number of births! Without fairly constant reminders people are very apt to become complacent. They have never seen a case of diphtheria and don't realise what it may be.

The total reinforcement injections was 15, that is the number of injections given four or five years after the first, which does not last at its full activity longer than that. May I congratulate the parents of these fifteen children on their duty to their children well done.

There were no cases of infantile paralysis.

The record of Vaccinations is not so satisfactory, the total number under 1 year of age being 12, age 1 - 2, 2 and the age 5 to 14, 3. That means that taking an average of births as 37, twenty three were unvaccinated. Taking Taunton as an example, 143 Vaccinations to 477 births, we are 1 to 2.6 - Taunton is 1 to 33, so though not satisfactory we are not bottom of the list - all these unvaccinated people are a potential danger!

The number of births in Watchet was 31, the number of deaths 32 - both figures a little lower than last year, when they were

35 and 37.

That makes the birth rate 13.54 and the death rate 10.58, which is satisfactory.

I have the following causes:-

Cardiac failure, which is really a mode of death - the cause being something that caused the cardiac failure, 4. The ages being 90, 81, 72, 70.

Bronchitis, 1, age 90.

Cancer of stomach, 2, of bowell 2, of lung 2. Ages, 82, 79, 78, 75, 63, 62.

Coronary Thrombosis, 4, ages 74, 68, 52, 48.

Cerebral haemorrhage, 7. Ages 85, 79, 69, 67, 66, 62, 52.

Myocarial degeneration, 1. Age 75.

Broncho-pneumonia 1, Age 87.

The ages of death that are of interest are:-

Two over 90, four between 80 and 90, eight between 70 and 80 and seven between 60 and 70.

Some deaths of Watchet people took place outside Watchet - at hospitals and such places. These include two people of 86 and 83, one of 77 and one of 75.

There was one death from Tuberculosis of a Watchet resident and this took place in hospital.

There was one death of an infant under one year, (in fact two hours,) the cause of death was atelectasis, which simply means that the child never properly developed its bodily functions.

From the above I think that Watchet still keeps its reputation for longevity.

There were four new cases of tuberculosis - three pulmonary and one other.

There were 25 cases of tuberculosis on the Register at the beginning of the year, 10 male and 15 female.

11 cases of pulmonary tuberculosis were taken off the Register, and 2 of non-pulmonary, of these in ten cases the disease was arrested, two cases left the district and one died, leaving 16 cases on the Register.

As I told you last year the "arrested" cases are seen at regular intervals by the T.M.O.

The number of new cases is more than last year, 4 as comparable with 2, so we should not relax our efforts against the disease.

Although we may regard progress as quite satisfactory it may be interesting to compare the Watchet figures again with another Urban District - Taunton. Watchet figures show one case to 635 of the population, Taunton 1 case to 642, a very small difference.

I think I should point out that in the case of a small place like Watchet statistical figures can be deceptive - one death of an infant under one year gives an infant mortality rate of 32.26 per thousand!



The water supply has been both chemically and bacteriologically quite satisfactory - the quantity was satisfactory except for a period in July when it was short owing to a failure of the springs without warning - further springs have been acquired by the Water Company and this should not occur again.

Examination of the raw water before chlorination has shown that this process is absolutely essential. It does, however, leave the water frequently with an abominable taste. I do not know the cost nowadays of a dechlorination plant but I feel that there may be public pressure for something of this kind in the not far distant future.

There were no reported cases of food poisoning during the year and that means that the two premises where food is prepared under the Food and Drugs Act, 1938, were quite satisfactorily conducted. The quality of the ice cream was good. 11 specimens being graded 1 and 8 graded 2 - nothing below.

I would, however, like to see all specimens graded and there is no reason why they should not be so and it might, incidentally be a talking point in any publicity campaign for an increase in the town's Summer visitors.

I see no reason to vary my wording last year - that the Caravan Sites were admirably conducted and, as usual, a number of sick people arrived, giving the local doctors considerable extra work and also tending to introduce infection to their neighbours who almost invariably inspect the sick person before the doctor.

No infectious diseases have been introduced to the Port by incoming ships, though there have been a number of minor accidents and some minor illness amongst their crews.

I inspected one empty house next door to the Star Inn. It was in an awful state and I should think an ideal home for vermin.- I understand that the owners agreed to deal with this place but I have seen no evidence of any activity. Perhaps the Council might like to press this matter:-

The two public conveniences are in good order and very well kept. I amuse myself by inspecting others belonging to neighbouring Councils - they are more modern and equally well kept but the defacement of the walls by half witted vandals was more marked.

And now a general review and comment:-

Our death rate was 10.58 per thousand - the rate for the whole Country was 11.4.

Our birth rate was 13.54 and that for the whole Country was 15.5.

There are signs that this year's birth rate will be higher, our rate for the previous year was 16.23 which was unusually high - over the two years we are nearly even.

As I pointed out in connection with the infantile death rate, in a small community such as ours one or two births or deaths can make a very perceptible difference in the rate per thousand.

In 1953 approximately 84 per cent of the previous year's births were immunised against diphtheria, in many cases combined with whooping cough. The County rate was 63 per cent. Although this looks very gratifying I should like to see a figure of 100 per cent.

The number of vaccinations of under fives was 14, which was far too low, I cannot give the percentage as I have no figures of the number of children under 5 years, but if one compares this with the number of births, 37, one realises that the figures are far too low the County figure for 1953 was 37 per cent, most

unsatisfactory.

I shall be most grateful if the district nurses and all kinds of welfare workers will do anything they can to get this figure raised.

Perhaps the Press could spare a paragraph on the subject.

Here is a short extract from last year's report of the M.O.H. for the city of Salford:-

"Doctors agree that there is much unnecessary suffering. People are not as fit as they should or could be. Too many of our people are in a state of "half health"..... all preventable illness is not prevented. It is the task of everyone in the Health Services to co-operate to overcome disease, lessen pain and suffering and raise the health of the people".

This is slowly taking place, a good deal of the time of the family doctor is devoted to the seeing and treating of apparently trivial illness, this is not a waste of time.

An appreciable amount of this "trivial" illness may develop into something more serious which in many cases it is possible to prevent.

This incursion is not, perhaps, completely within the province of the M.O.H. but I think that the Public Health Service and the services of the family doctor cannot be regarded as two quite separate affairs nowadays.

I will conclude with thanks to the district nurses, the Home Helps, and the Ambulance officer for their invaluable work. Also to the Surveyor for his help and co-operation when I have had to bother him.

(sgd) MYLES TONKS.

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6.12.54.